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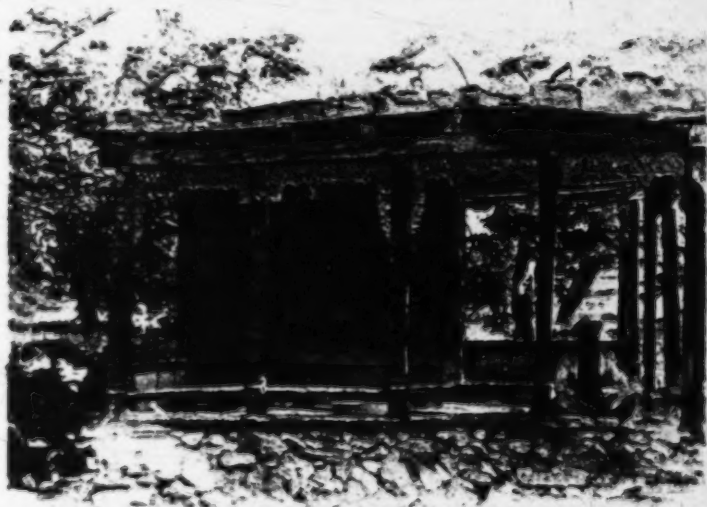


PLATE VI

1. Old fort-village of Aliábád with beacon tower. Background, Rakapóshi. (See p. 123)

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Old Mosque at Aliábád, with Hurmat seated in verandah. (See p. 132)



[Facing p. 80]

ILLNESS CALLS A HALT

175 Some time in the days of our earliest Edwards, a princess of
 361 Baltistán married the reigning prince of Hunza. For the last
 712 hundred years or so the direct route to Baltistán has been
 completely blocked by advancing glaciers, but for centuries
 before, the two countries had been in communication with
 each other. Hunza consisted then of three small villages only:
 Áltit and Ganesh on the river cliffs, and Báltit high above.
 The princess's father sent with the bride an army of Balti
 masons, carpenters, and craftsmen, who built the two forts
 of Áltit and Báltit as part of the royal dowry, and to-day they
 still stand proudly on their cliffs, impregnable to assault,
 [171] centres of ancient ceremonial. To this day, too, the Hunzukuts
 modestly attribute all their simple arts to Balti influence.

173 The original inhabitants of Hunza proper are said to be
 643 descended from three soldiers of Alexander the Great, who
 were left behind sick, presumably plus their womenfolk, and
 thus while their comrades marched on became the founders
 of the three first villages in this inhospitable region. Like so
 many royal houses in Central Asia, the family that has ruled
 for more than six centuries in Hunza and Nagir likes to claim
 descent from Alexander himself. But while the Mir of Nagir,
 Sir Sikander (= Alexander) Khan still upholds this tradition,
 we noticed that the shrewder Mir of Hunza—who must have
 seen many a courteously-veiled smile greet this familiar
 genealogy—shied off the topic.

What seems probable is that the royal family is not in
 origin of the same stock as the people, and that it may well—
 as tradition asserts—have come from Persia at some prehistoric
 date. What is certain is that it can trace its authentic ancestry
 as far back as can the House of Windsor.

173 There may well be truth in the legend of the European
 144 descent of the Hunza Burusho, for in temperament and looks
 our Hunza friends have nothing of the "Oriental" about them.
 Take from them the very lightly bronzed complexion, "the
 shadow'd livery of the burnished sun," to which at this alti-
 tude they are "neighbour and near bred," and you could
 transplant them without incongruity to the moors of Yorkshire
 or the Scottish lowlands.

LAND AND HOUSES IN HUNZA

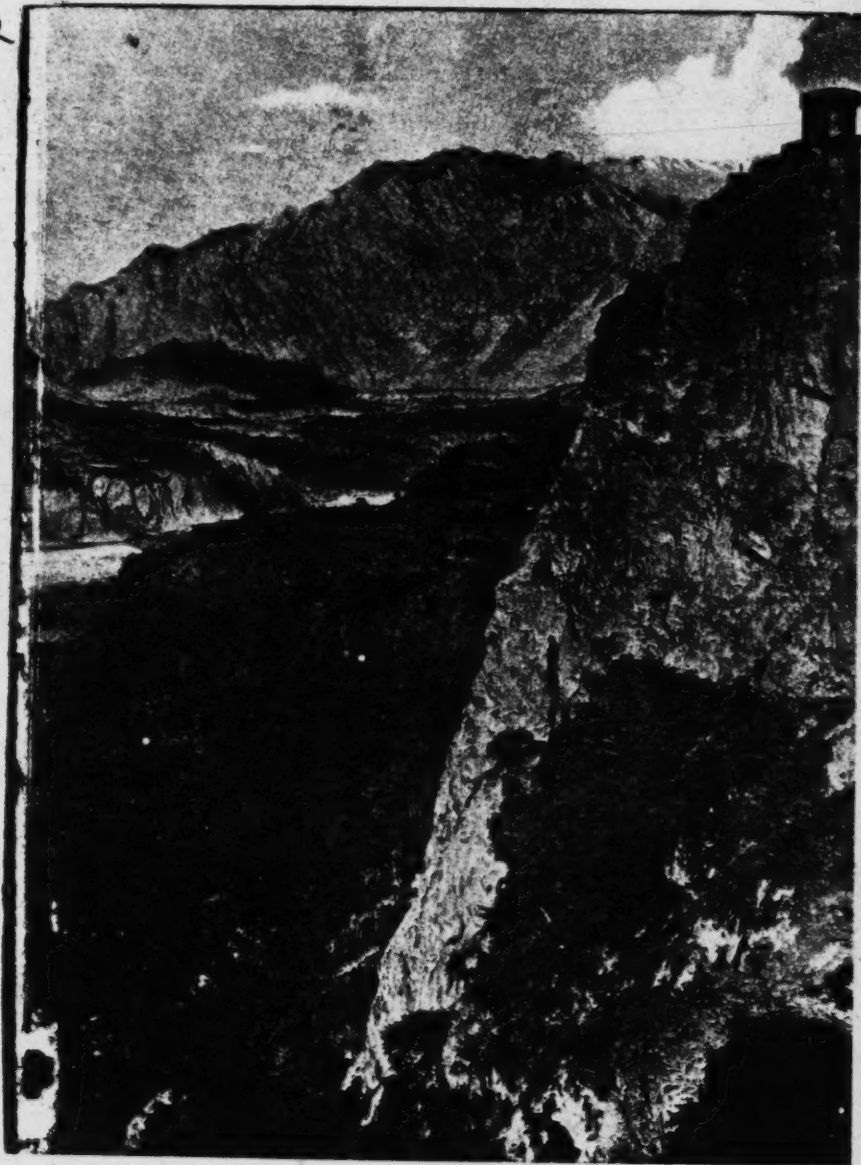
under-valued, but a boy will bring a wife to the house and 556
children to the hearth, while a daughter will take her labour 842
and her children to her husband's home.

In pre-British days the Hunza men bore a bad name in 579
Central Asia as daring raiders. They are a hardy, fearless race, 175
and they would strike a track through uninhabited and un- 721
inhabitable mountain country, leaving dumps of food at in-
tervals as they went, fall on a rich caravan travelling from Leh
to Yaqand, carry off the spoil, and return—via their food
dumps—to divide the proceeds, the lion's share of which fell,
of course, to their brigand chief. Any prisoners captured were
sold as slaves into Afghanistan or Central Asia. Alternatively
they would raid across the river into Nagir and come back
with slaves and cattle.

Since such a form of life invites reprisals the Hunza people 361
lived walled in in tight-packed villages close under their forts. 712
We had in Aliábád the old fort-village, built on a promontory, 202
with ravines protecting it on both sides, surrounded by a wall 175
whose twelve beacon towers could send warning of a raid up
and down the river—"and the red glare on Skiddaw roused
the burghers of Carlisle." Only one of these beacon towers
now remains and the crowded hovels are falling to decay. Since
the *Pax Britannica* has come, the peasant builds his house and
stores his crops out amongst his fields and orchards—without
even a watchdog. A few conservative families move into their
old "town house" in winter time perhaps for warmth and
companionship, perhaps merely to make a change.

These famous raids were primarily the sport of chieftains, 175
and the peasants of to-day find adventure enough, and danger 579
enough, in their daily life not to regret them. The profits of
such raids, which welcomely supplemented the scanty produce 643
of the fields, are nowadays more than compensated by the 648
money which the British put into circulation. The Mir draws
a small and well-earned salary for his services as guardian of
the frontier, a grant for keeping up the road through his
territory, and a subsidy for his bodyguard of twenty-four men
or so. Any sons the peasant can temporarily spare take service 463
with the Gilgit Scouts, in the Public Works or other Govern-

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Old Fort at Âlrit, centre of ancient ceremoni-*al*. (See pp. 106, 117)

PLATE XIX
[Facing P. 256]

These chambers were once living rooms and bedrooms. 344
It reminded me of a penthouse. While it didn't have an 644
elevator to whiz you upwards in a matter of seconds
or the best in modern plumbing, it did have the air,
the view, the history and fascination that no penthouse
in creation could match.

Back about 400 years ago one of the rulers of Hunza [173]
married a daughter of the King of Baltistan who, as [648]
a gift to his daughter and her husband, dispatched 500
workmen from his country to Hunza to erect the Baltit
Fort that we now know. The rulers of Hunza dwelt
in that fort and made it their palace until recent times.
The present Mir, too, when he took office after the [712]
death of his father, resided in this palace known as
Baltit Fort.

The new palace, in which we were being wined, [122]
dined and entertained, had been completed recently
and was taken possession of by the present Mir about
7 years ago. Actually though, the new palace was
started by the Mir's grandfather back as far as 1925.

While we were guests at the palace, extensive ma-
sonry work was in progress as the Mir was having a
broad, low, stone-walled veranda erected. This, I un- [692]
derstand, would be used, on completion, as his court, [643]
where the citizens of Hunza would come with their
problems and where the Mir would preside in judg-
ment.

However, this work in no way interfered with the [342]
normal functions of the household, for, even as the
people of Hunza follow the custom of moving upstairs
for the summer and downstairs for the winter, so did
the Mir.

To me, however, old Baltit Fort was an edifice of
distinction, charm and beauty and if I were in the
Mir's place, I would never have abandoned it.

344 This massive old fortress, for that is what it was,
644 was actually one of the places that had withstood the
● 712 attacks of invaders for more than 400 years and re-
727 mained impregnable. It has only once been in enemy
[175] hands since the day it was built and that was in 1891,
when, after the Battle of Nilt, it was occupied by the
British. Records further indicate that the British added
no glory to their occupation at the time because of their
indiscriminate looting of the treasures found in the
palace. But the Mir, whether because of his friendship
for the British or because of his desire to tell the truth,
claimed that it was not the British who looted it, but
the Dogra troops who were under British command.

344 Here I would like to quote from E. F. Knight's
644 *Where Three Empires Meet*:

352 "This massive fortress, which has been for hundreds
of years the secure stronghold of the robber kings, in-
volute until this day, stands boldly out, set in the
midst of a sublime landscape . . . Twigg, Boisragon and
myself took up our quarters in the most comfortable
chamber we could find, which we soon discovered to
have been the apartment of the ladies belonging to the
[643] Thum's harem. ("Thum" is Burushaski for ruler, sover-
eign, king, chief, "Mir". Used especially of the heredi-
tary rulers of the states of Hunza and Nagir.) It was
surrounded by a low, broad, wooden divan, on which
our bedding was laid. Pillars of carved wood rose from
the edge of the divan to the carved beams of the roof,
blackened by the smoke of ages. . . . A fire was lit in
the open fireplace at one end of the floor, the smoke
escaping through a square hole in the roof. Save for
the Oriental pattern of the wooden carvings it was just
a hall, I imagine, as King Canute might have lived in.
. . . We enjoyed a delicious night's rest after our late
fatigues.

CHAPTER 33

The Mir's Summer Cottage

ALTIT FORT has quite a history. I believe it to be the most historic and most important edifice in all of Hunza. Records that have been handed down would indicate that the fort was about 700 years old and it was erected like a perch, right on a sharp bank of the Hunza River, on what was originally a sharp gigantic precipice:

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It may be smaller and perhaps simpler in construction than the larger fort at Baltit, but I thought it was big enough after I walked all around it and went in and out of all its chambers. Then, too, it is much larger now than it was in those days because the present Mir had a new wing erected so that when he holds court and carries out the seed-sowing ceremony, there will be plenty of room for his family, guests and visitors.

[643]

I gained the impression that it was a tight little fortress—well built from blocks of rock, expertly

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● 712 wedged together to form a formidable protection
against invaders of their day.

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643 'Tis for the Festival of the Bopfau, which is the
Burushaski name given to the barley-seed-sowing festi-
val, that the Mir comes dressed in all his regal finery
and robes of state to practice a ritual that has been
carried on for hundreds of years by the Mirs of Hunza.

[173] It would appear this ceremony is a carry-over from
that performed by the ancient Greeks and the people
of Hunza like to emphasize this, as though forging
another link in the chain of evidence that would tie
them in as descendants of Alexander the Great.

[292] On this occasion the Mir wears a magnificent gown
with a wide belt fastened around his waist, in harmony
with the gold brocade that bedecks the gown. At his
side he carries the ceremonial sword in a carved ivory
scabbard. He makes a most imposing, handsome figure
with his head crowned with a clerical cap with flowing
egret feathers held in place by a large golden pin. The
Mir's brother, Ayesh, and the Mir's eldest son, the heir
apparent, come similarly attired.

With an assembled crowd watching, the Mir drives
a plough pulled by two oxen or a yak down and back
along the field and into this furrow he sprinkles seed
mixed with gold dust. The ceremony is repeated three
times and then the Mir throws handfuls of the seed
[789] into the air. Fable has it that if anyone catches a grain
of seed and takes it home and mixes it with his own
seed, he will be assured of a fine harvest.

The seed-sowing ceremony is not only performed at
Altit but in two other Hunzan villages so that the Hun-
zan farmers can come and catch a seed to insure them-
selves of plenty for the following year. By doing it in
three different locations, it means that no Hunzan
farmer will have to walk more than a few miles to
partake of the Mir's blessings.

partake of the Mir's blessings.

In comparing the fort at Altit and the one at Baltit, I gained the impression that the one at Altit had more rooms . . . smaller ones they were, but there seemed to be more of them. The old fort at Baltit was much larger and more impressive. Yet somehow I became more attached to the Altit Fort. I had the impression that it was almost impregnable.

Then I recalled the true story of the capture of the fort by the British and, after appraising its isolation, strength and precipitous banks and sides, I thought to myself, "Any group of men who had the courage to attempt to scale and capture any fort in Hunza deserved a lot more glory and loot than they would ever get in Hunza . . . and that is for certain!"

On one of the balconies stood a man with a bowl of apricots and Sultan Ali said, "This man is the chowkidor, or guardian, of the fort and it is customary to give him a gift."

"Of what?" I asked.

"Oh, about 10 rupees," replied Sultan Ali.

Jahangir almost jumped a foot when he heard that and he said, "For what? He hasn't done anything and we haven't eaten any of his apricots."

"Well," Sultan Ali said, "it's just customary!"

"Customary or no," said Jahangir, "I think it's ridiculous!"

I turned to Sultan Ali and said, "Normally I'd be glad to give him the tip that you suggest, but the truth of the matter is my fund of Pakistan rupees is just about nonexistent. When we set out for Hunza from Pindi we calculated in advance approximately how many rupees we would need and then we added on 100 extra, and that's what we came with.

"From the stories that we read and from the infor-

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133 seven and eight hundred feet deep, each one filled
 487 up by the end of a glacier, the main mass of which
 361 was out of sight. We passed through numerous
 241 villages whose cultivation, carried far up the moun-
 tain side, was of the richest. Each village was
 surrounded by fruit trees, and poplar, plane, and
 ● [7/2] walnut trees abounded. Every village was either
 enclosed in a large square fort, with towers at
 each corner, or had a fort close to it.

133 The third day took us into Nagar. On leaving
 camp we crossed a great shingle slope, nearly a mile
 in length, at a point hundreds of feet above the river.
 Huge cliffs crowned the slope, and made this one of
 the most difficult pieces of road, from a military point
 of view, that we had yet passed. During our two
 last marches we saw conglomerate cliffs and rocks full
 of garnets, some very fine white sandstone, and in
 one place a cliff of clay, which was said to be full of
 [361] gold. Nagar lies off the main valley, some three
 [241] miles up another stream, and the last few miles into
 it the road ran almost without interruption through
 cultivation. The fruit trees were a sight to see,
 apricot trees bending under a burden of red gold
 fruit, their harvest just beginning, and every house
 roof, and any other available flat space, was covered
 with the fruit drying in the sun. As we turned our
 backs on the main valley the view was superb.
 133 Behind us Rukapushi rose in gigantic precipices of
 241 thousands of feet of snow and ice, while across the
 361 river above Hunza towered another great mountain,
 its crest broken by sharp granite peaks on which no
 snow can rest. Its lower spurs are jagged and bare,
 and below them lay a large semi-circle, one mass of

1891]

A CONFIDENT ENEMY

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bone of the force, four hundred Gurkhas and Dogras of the Kashmir Body Guard Regiment, two hundred and fifty Dogras of the Kashmir Ragu Pertab Regiment, a hundred and fifty Punyali levies, and a small detachment of twenty men of the 20th Punjab Infantry, my personal escort, half with a gatling gun and half attached to the Punyalis to stiffen them, and the seven-pounders of the Hazara mountain battery. A larger force could not have been fed in the country, a smaller could not have undertaken the job. Opposed to us I counted on finding some four or five thousand men indifferently armed, but very skilful and dangerous enemies behind stone walls. 000

Our advance was unopposed, but the path had been cut away in places, and the march was slightly delayed, so that it was about midday before we crossed the last rising ground and saw Nilt and Mayun before us. Flags fluttered gaily from their walls, and a burst of cheering and the roll of drums told us we were expected. Men could be seen hurrying into the fort and entering the sungahs, stone breastworks, on the hills behind it. At the foot of the slope we were descending I halted my little army, which looked tinier than ever as the detachments closed up, and sent for the officers commanding the different bodies to explain my plan of attack. 726

The forts in the Hindu Kush are generally square, with towers at the corners, the solid walls, often ten to fifteen feet thick for some feet from the base, are built of stones and mud strengthened by timbers, but the towers, which are high, are more flimsy, and the loosening of a timber frame might bring them down with a run. 712 •

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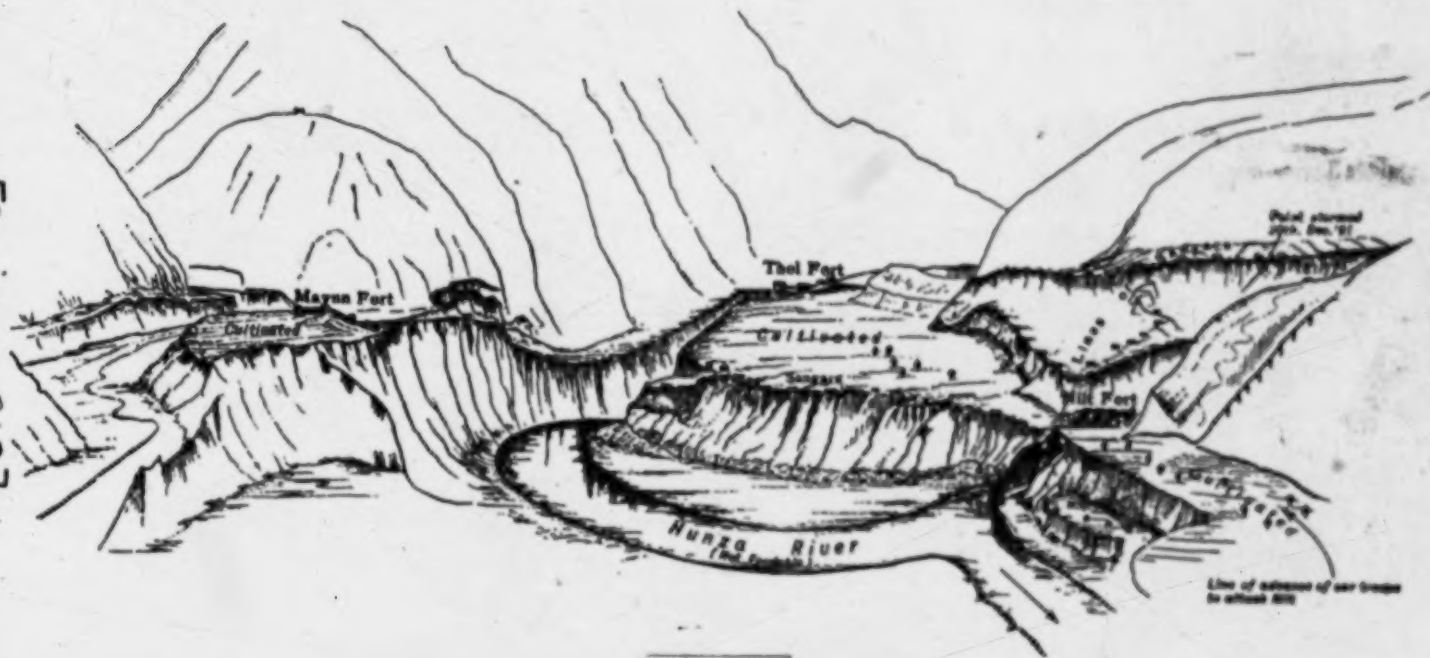
THE GAME BEGINS

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726 and went rolling up the valley ahead of us. We had got in closer than the officer commanding the guns, Lieutenant Gorton, R.A., thought, and the range was only two hundred and fifty yards.

Then the game began in earnest; the little guns pegged away at the corner tower and burst shells inside the fort, and the enemy opened a very heavy but ill-directed fire on us, from which we suffered but little, for they were firing down hill, and our men were fairly well under cover of the walls of the terraced fields, and the bank of a big irrigation channel. Ten minutes was enough to show Gorton and me that we were doing no good; the tower, we found out afterwards, had been built up solid to the top, and the time had come for the decisive attack. The order was given, and with a cheer a covering party of Gurkhas dashed forward, lined the last terrace wall, and opened a hot fire on the loopholes of the fort; under cover of their fire Aylmer and his storming party crossed the open and threw themselves into the ditch.

712 The gate of the fort was in the centre of the main wall, and was hidden from our view by a six-foot wall built on the edge of the ditch, which the enemy had loopholed but had omitted to hold. The ditch was full of abattis made of whole trees, which also stretched from it to the end of the spur above the fort. A path was found through the abattis leading to a small door which gave access to the passage between the outer and main wall; this door was under a heavy fire from the sungahs across the ravine, but it was speedily forced with the loss of one man, and once through it the



THE NILT - MAYUN POSITION
from the West.

[Facing p. 262]

241 covered with orchards of fruit trees. The cultivation is extremely good, and fruit of all kinds grows in abundance.

771 Mahommedanism sits but loosely on the Hunza people, who make no secret of their preference for easy-going tenets. Though professing to be Maulais, they are disowned by their own Pirs, who refuse to visit the country, and no contributions are sent by them to their spiritual chief. They are great wine-drinkers, and are reproached by their neighbours for their readiness to eat unorthodox food,* and for the immorality of their women. Firearms are scarce, and bows and arrows are still not quite obsolete.

564 The people of Hunza and Nager belong to the caste called Yeshkun by the Shins, but amongst themselves known as Boorish. They differ slightly in appearance, the Nager people apparently showing an infusion of Tartar blood, derived, no doubt, from their Iskardo neighbours. The Hunza people, who are a somewhat taller race, have finer features and are distinguished for being more deliberate and less vivacious in their actions. The language, called Boorishki or Boorishaski, is identical in both states; the Hunza pronunciation being rather more broad and drawling than that of Nager. This language was first published by Dr. Leitner. All their songs, however, are in Shina,—a language which is supposed to lend itself more readily to poetry,—and Shina songs are sung by men who do not understand a word of that language.

576 Both Thums are still addressed as Soori, as a title of respect. This appears to be the same as *Sri*, an appellation of Lakshmi, the Hindoo goddess of wealth, commonly prefixed to the names of Hindoo princes in India, to denote their honour and prosperity. The Thum's wives are styled "*ganish*," which is almost identical with the original Sanscrit word for mother, and their sons are called "*gushpoor*." In cutting the throat of an animal for food, the people of Hunza make a practice of turning it towards the Thum's abode, even when many miles distant, instead of in the orthodox direction of Mecca.

712 Every village, according to its size, possesses one or more forts, sufficient to give shelter to the whole population. These are built of sun-dried bricks, with walls 15 feet high, and square towers at intervals of 20 yards. At night the whole population takes refuge within the walls. Similar forts exist in Gilgit, but under Cashmere rule they have fallen into disuse.

000 In Hunza there is a tradition preserved of the occurrence

* Animals not slaughtered according to the manner prescribed by Mahommedan law.